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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 000220

SIPDIS

BAGHDAD FOR AMBASSADOR ERELI

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [ASEC](#) [BA](#)
SUBJECT: BAHRAIN: ROYAL PARDONS FOR SHIA DETAINEES

REF: A. MANAMA 190
[B. MANAMA 172](#)
[C. MANAMA 22](#)
[D. 08 MANAMA 762](#)
[E. 08 MANAMA 471](#)
[F. 08 MANAMA 536](#)

Classified By: CDA Christopher Henzel for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Bahrain's King pardoned 178 people charged with security-related crimes, including key radical oppositionists following a meeting with leading Shia clerics and politicians. The moderate Wifaq party played an important role in the settlement, delivering a major success for its Shia constituency and showing itself to be a credible advocate for the concerns of the Shia street. A Shia radical leader has called for an end to violent protests. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) Local news outlets reported on the evening of April 11 that King Hamad pardoned 178 people charged with security-related crimes, including Haq leader Hassan Musheima, Abduljalil Singace, cleric Abduljalil Al Maqdad, and activist Abdulhadi Al Khawaja. Normally restive Shia villages erupted in spontaneous celebrations that carried over into the next day.

[1](#)3. (C) Wifaq parliamentarian Jawad Fairooz asserted to poloff on April 12 that the pardon applied to everyone arrested for security-related crimes, including the killing of a Pakistani man in March (ref B), the alleged Hujaira terrorist plot (ref C), the April 2008 killing of a police officer in Karzakkan (ref D), the March 2008 arson attack on a farm (ref D), and actions during and after the December 2007 riots (ref E). Wifaq leader Ali Salman repeated this account in a public statement on April 13, adding that while the suspects in the two death cases were included in the Royal Pardon, they would remain in custody until an agreement on financial compensation for the victims' families could be reached. Senior Public Prosecutor Nawaf Al Mouada confirmed to poloff on April 13 that all security detainees had been released except those involved in the two deaths, pending a compensation agreement.

Wifaq Takes Credit

[1](#)4. (SBU) Wifaq quickly hit the airwaves to take credit for the amnesty. Secretary General Ali Salman held a press conference and Deputy Secretary General Shaikh Hussain Daihi gave an exclusive interview on Bahrain TV. Both thanked the King, reiterated their commitment to non-violence, and recounted how diligently Wifaq had worked with the Ministry of Interior and the King to achieve the pardon. Daihi stressed that all parts of society - the government, families, the Ulama, and villages - share in the responsibility to steer Bahrain's youth away from violence.

Salman said that violence had weakened the opposition and tarnished its reputation internationally.

¶5. (C) Wifaq is claiming this as its victory. Fairouz told poloff that just before the government publicized the pardons late in the evening on April 11, Salman had convened a meeting of senior Wifaq leaders and told them that the pardons, and two of their other demands, had been agreed upon in a private meeting with the King on April 6. During the meeting, which included leading Shia clerics Isa Qassim, Abdulla Al-Ghoraifi, Abdulhussain Al Sitri, and Hussain Najati (ref F), King Hamad agreed to pardon all security detainees unconditionally, and overturn two decrees by the Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs - one that required all religious locations to register with the ministry and the other that the ministry approve all religious sermons prior to their delivery. The clerics agreed that a preacher whose sermon violated the law should be prosecuted, but the ministry should not close the mosque. With the distraction of the detainees eliminated, Fairouz said that Wifaq would focus on its core issues: naturalization, housing, and unemployment.

Radical Opposition Reacts

¶6. (SBU) Hassan Musheima gave a speech shortly after he was released in which he thanked the political and religious leaders who worked to secure the pardon, specifically mentioning Isa Qassim. He added that he does and has not supported violent confrontation, and called for his supporters to help build the country. Musheima, like Wifaq,

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called the pardon a good first step in a "new era of cooperation," and called upon all sides to look to the future rather than the recent past. (NOTE: The tone of Musheima's speech was conciliatory, not victorious, which may indicate that he was involved in the negotiations, as suggested by some oppositionists. End Note.)

¶7. (SBU) Abduljalil Maqdad, a Shia cleric who generally opposes Isa Qassim, praised the work of unnamed leaders who secured the King's concessions. Maqdad was not as conciliatory as Musheima, calling for continued pressure on the government.

¶8. (C) Comment: The pardon agreement appears to be a win for Wifaq, the government, and the King. Salman showed that he can play the part of statesman, quietly working with the establishment to deliver on an issue of great importance to the Shia street. The government, with its case against the alleged Hujaira plotters looking weak, escaped the potential embarrassment of a full-blown court battle, and the King got to play the part of the magnanimous ruler. We expect other, private aspects to the deal to emerge over time, and will be interested to see whether Musheima has agreed to engage in conventional politics and end his opposition to Shia participation in parliament. If he and his followers are not brought in somehow, we may find ourselves in a few months re-entering the familiar cycle of protests, detentions, and new pardons. End Comment.

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